

**Notes from the Rural Services Network
North East Regional Seminar/Meeting
Kindly hosted by Durham County Council
25th May 2018**

Present

Cllr Kevin Beaty, Eden District Council – Chair of the meeting
Cllr Heather Liddle, Durham County Council
Cllr Joanne Carr, Durham County Council
Cllr John Shuttleworth, Durham County Council
Cllr John Clare, Durham County Council
Helen Wright, East Riding of Yorkshire Council
Cllr Patricia Jopling, Durham, County Council
Graham Black, Durham County Council
Cllr Ossie Johnson, Durham County Council
Cllr Eunice Huntington, Durham County Council
Ian Hunter, Littoral Arts
Claire Watts, East Riding Council
Clive Gray, Blyth Tall Ship
Tony Kirsop, Northumberland County Council
Cllr Marianne Overton, Lincolnshire County Council & North Kesteven District Council
Ivan Annibal, Rose Regeneration
Andy Dean, RSN

1. **Apologies:** Due to the amount of apologies, these can be [downloaded here](#)

2. **Introduction**

Kevin Beaty welcomed everyone, setting out the context for the meeting and the benefits of RSN in relation to financial and other outcomes.

3. **Andy Dean, Assistant Director RSN**

Andy set out the background to the operation of RSN and its services. Helen Wright asked whether RSN have connections with the Regional Food and Farming Networks. It was confirmed that some connections do exist but that the operation of these Networks varied across the country.

In response to a question about the Rural Housing Alliance, Andy confirmed that this is a network of 35 Housing Associations with a rural specialism for which RSN provide the secretariat. 20 of the members were also members of RSN, one of which is North East based.

4. **Claire Watts, East Riding Council – Measuring Impact**

Claire outlined the approach developed in East Riding to measure the impact of economic development, particularly in rural areas. This recognised the need to include social as well as economic value as a mechanism for analysing the wider impacts of service and investment decisions.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation have developed an 'Inclusive Growth Monitor' for use at the geographic level of Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs).

The model developed by East Riding Council, in partnership with Rose Regeneration, is called the 'Social Value Engine' (SVE). This uses financial proxies to arrive at an estimate of impact. For example, an analysis of the Council's homelessness service demonstrated that every £1 invested generated £11.59 in social impact.

Claire confirmed that the SVE methodology had already been used to accompany funding applications and influence funders. Northumberland County Council have also found SVE to be a useful tool.

5. Clive Gray & Tony Kirsop, Blyth Tall Ship project

Tony introduced himself and the social enterprise background to this project. 2019 will mark the 200 year anniversary of the discovery of Antarctica by a Blyth based vessel. The Blyth Tall Ship project set out to work at the heart of the local community and to inspire the hearts and minds of local people. The project has evolved into a dynamic skills and employability initiative with the refurbishment of a second hand tall ship from Denmark at its heart.

The project now trains 40 young people per annum with 30% moving direct into employment and 40% into further education. Training is to NVQ levels 1, 2 and 3. The project employs just 5 people whilst utilizing an extensive bank of 80 local volunteers.

Clive Gray has led the project since its inception and has been pivotal to the success so far. A specific issue was raised in relation to funding from the Skills Funding Agency which does not recognise the subjects taught at the project. This means that only Level 1 qualifications have been able to register with the Skills Funding Agency for financial support.

During discussion the opportunity to work with small niche companies was recognised together with success in developing entrepreneurialism as well as employment.

6. Councilor Marianne Overton – A perspective on rural economic development

Marianne introduced the role of the Local Government Association (LGA) in supporting member initiatives and spoke about some of the challenges of seeking funding through Government from an LGA perspective. Local authority commercialisation was identified as a very important agenda in this context. Marianne suggested that increasing housing isn't the solution to local economic development but that matching infrastructure is the challenge in this context.

The importance of the new 'UK Shared Prosperity Fund' was identified with the LGA keen to ensure the dividend from investing in the EU is returned to local authorities. Marianne suggested that new funding should be linked to local need in the context of this dividend. IN relation to consultation regarding the future replacement of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), Marianne reported that the LGA has put a case for local authorities to receive some of these resources in the context of local economic development.

The role of the Council of the Regions was seen as important in the context of the EU. It was suggested that the loss of this mechanism could diminish the voice of local government overall.

Marianne also identified the National Planning Policy Framework as an important issue from the economic development perspective.

7. Issues raised through discussion:

Specific points raised included the following:

- The planning system can prove restrictive, particularly in relation to definitions used for so called 'sustainable settlements.'
- The relationship between neighbourhood plans and the NPPF needs careful explanation and understanding. In this context it was noted that a North East regional event was taking place on 20 June concerning community-led, affordable housing. The booking link for this event is: <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/north-east-community-led-housing-conference-tickets-46062944507>
- The need to address the lack of implementation associated with numerous planning permissions in the context of land-banking was raised along with Local Plan weaknesses in terms of the need for a 5 year land supply and the erosion of developer's obligations to provide affordable housing. It was noted that land-banking can relate to retail development as well as housing.
- Emerging from a rural Brexit roundtable exercise, RSN had identified a need for a dedicated 'Rural Strategy' as a focus for government policy towards rural communities and their economies. A draft was currently under development.
- In the context of local authority agendas in relation to local action, sometimes functioning economic geographies or environmental geographies are important rather than local authority boundaries.
- The recent announcement of a House of Lords Select Committee looking into the Rural Economy was noted. RSN will be feeding into this direct.
- It was important to note that the private sector is stepping back from service provision in many rural communities meaning that there is a need to influence the private sector too.
- The social enterprise approach will be part of the solution to rural economic development. This requires a different series of delivery models which should be recognised by local authorities. "There has never been a greater need for innovation in delivery of local services." It was noted that this is the very theme of the RSN Rural Conference scheduled for September details of which will be announced shortly.
- Devolution of funding was seen as critical to successful delivery of rural economic development in the future and efforts to attempt to achieve this were applauded. Local solutions are required in local areas.
- With respect to County Durham, it was felt very strongly that the rural nature of much of the county should be recognised. It was perceived that Durham often seems too urban to benefit from rural-specific funding and vice versa.

- It is important to learn from previously successful pilot programmes when developing new government initiatives. The Rural Growth Network programme in the North East was identified as one such successful pilot.
- It was agreed that any additional comments which members wished to make could be sent via email to RSN.

Durham County Council were thanked for hosting the meeting and all members for their attendance and positive contributions.