

**Notes from the Rural Services Network
South West Regional Seminar/ Meeting
Kindly hosted by East Devon District Council
6th March 2018**

- Attendees:** Cllr Adam Paynter, (RSN Vice Chair for SW and Leader Cornwall County Council) David Inman (Director, RSN), Kerry Booth (Assistant Chief Executive, RSN), Susan Howl (East Devon District Council), Teresa Harvey (Sedgemoor District Council), Gary Powell (East Devon), Vikki Thomas (Dorset & Wiltshire Fire & Rescue), Cllr Amanda Ford (Teignbridge District Council), Cllr Rosemary Berry (Mid Devon District Council), Mandella Edwards (Hastoe Housing), Peter Moore (Cornwall Rural Housing Association), Cllr Andrew Leadbetter (Devon County & Exeter City Council), Cllr Saywell (Devon County Council), David Francis (National Pensioners Convention), Cllr Philip Hackett (Torridge District Council), Cllr Andrew Hadley (West Somerset Council), Cllr Paul Butterworth (Bath & NE Somerset Council), Kate Darch (Gloucester RCC), Andrea Gilbert (Inclusion Cornwall), Ivan Annibal (Rose Regeneration), Jessica Sellick (Rose Regeneration)
- Apologies:** The apologies for this meeting can be downloaded [here](#)
- Welcome:** Councillor Adam Paynter, as Vice Chair of RSN representing the South West, opened the meeting and welcomed everyone to East Devon.
- Format:** David Inman of RSN outlined the new format of the Regional Meetings/Seminars and stressed the need for the RSN to promote a realistic view of life in Rural England and to provide a voice to rural service providers. He hoped that authorities would appreciate the opportunity to attend regional meetings rather than always having to travel to the national meetings held in London. These would also provide the opportunity for regional networking. This is the first year of trialing regional meetings and in future years, a programme of dates would be provided in advance at the start of the year to enable more to attend.
- Seminar Session**

Assisting Vulnerable People in Rural Areas

a) Kate Darch – Gloucester RCC – Village Agents

Kate kindly outlined the Village and Community Agent Project. These agents work within their local communities, approx. 10-15 hours a week supporting older people to stay at home and be independent. The agents facilitate access to services and have a vast knowledge of services in their local area. The concept was launched in 2006 as a DWP pilot in 96 areas and in 2008 was launched as a mainstream service. Other areas have developed similar schemes building on the approach to gain funding from other sources.

Village agents help to address social isolation and join up communities, helping to support the Prevention Agenda. Changes in the last 6 months have meant that the service comes under the Community Wellbeing Service for Gloucester and the age range has widened that the service supports. Digital exclusion is an issue recognized by the agents and there are also issues with broadband speeds and connectivity in the area. Some of the agents have backgrounds in public service i.e. police / nurse etc. but all are excellent communicators. Further information and a copy of the presentation is attached.

b) Andrea Gilbert – Inclusion Cornwall

Andrea outlined the Inclusion Cornwall project which is a cross sector partnership hosted by Cornwall County Council. They aim to 'challenge with diplomacy' where services are not working for customers. 17 neighbourhoods in Cornwall are on the most deprived list in England, 21% are economically inactive, the aim of the Inclusion Hub is to knit people together. There are a number of projects which inclusion Cornwall support for example the Winter wellbeing (Warm & Well) and the Helston & Lizard project. The Winter Wellbeing project prevented 63 hospital admissions. In 2016/17 for example the Winter Wellbeing service included over 30 partners to deliver common outcomes of reducing fuel poverty, improving health and progress to work. The Helston & Lizard Project was a specific piece of work where the DWP asked Inclusion Cornwall to work with approximately 200 people to help them gain skills, work experience and enhance their CV's through projects that will benefit communities across the area.

6. David Inman – Rural Vulnerability Statistics

David circulated a paper which included a number of statistics which help to demonstrate the depth of vulnerability in rural areas. Whilst urban areas may also experience some of these issues, when taken together and along with the lack of access to transport and services, rural vulnerability can be a very serious issue.

There was a lengthy discussion in the afternoon which focused on rural social care and health and for ease of reference, the information discussed at this session has been split into three areas:

- Indicators – what data would people like to see, or should we be encouraging the collection of?
- What issues affect rural social care and health in South West? – this also developed into a wider discussion on rural issues.
- Best Practice / signposts to useful information

INDICATORS – What data would people like to see, or should we be encouraging the collection of?

- How many missed appointments are there for health services due to lack of transport? How much is that costing the health service?
- More information about fuel poverty and the effects of fuel poverty
- Education and Health Outcomes, are these measured together? i.e. does increased education lead to better health outcomes?

- Any statistics on preventing ill health through education on nutrition and diet, are there statistics in relation to this?
- Important indicator is average incomes in relation to market rents – not everyone can buy in rural areas and so have to rent at high prices.
- How many people are taking up Help to Buy Scheme – after 5 years you start paying interest and does everyone on the scheme understand that their mortgage payments will jump up...storing up problems for the future
- Income levels mapped to communities that have produced a neighbourhood plan. Are resources targeted in the right areas so that everyone has the support to develop neighbourhood plans?
- Role of Parish Council increases at this current time but do they all have the right support?
- Rural residents can be very independent and loathed to claim benefits even if they are entitled to them...can you measure how many should be claiming?
- Suicide rates – Devon has high suicide rate – up to age 45-50 it is the biggest killer. Could be up to 4 times higher if not always clear cut so figures should be more – North Devon is a hotspot
- Lack of data on times and mileage for social services / there are areas where councils can't find providers, market forces intervene and it is difficult to provide services

ISSUES affecting rural social care and health in South West

- For housing development in rural areas where there is no mains as or sewer network, this can increase costs.
- Small developments in rural areas of 5 houses, may all be different to suit the local needs, i.e. affordable housing, single person property, family property, housing for older people and can therefore be expensive for the developer as they are not all standard properties. However, these can mean that people can stay in their homes for longer and become more independent.
- Need to make connection between housing and health benefits
- Good new housing and bringing housing up to standard can make a big impact on health
- Digital Exclusion – not everyone doesn't want to learn. Need to make extra arrangements for rural areas for example run sessions in libraries.
- New Homes need the right infrastructure and services to promote proper communities
- High Street Banks are closing, can we encourage Post offices to take over some of their services?
- Air Quality can be an issue
- Are Health and Wellbeing Boards working as well as they are meant to be – can they drill down into rural deprivation?
- Devon are currently looking at their Health and Wellbeing Board as Hospitals are not part of the process currently.

- It can be dangerous to push people to do all services online, particularly with the rise in dementia which can make it difficult to use services which require large amounts of passwords.
- Losing banks is an issue for rural small businesses, they may take cash but have nowhere to bank their takings to run their businesses.
- Cybercrime is also an issue with moving people onto digital services
- There has been a case study on a shop in Councillor Paynter's authority where the shop was completely turned around and now provides a range of services which ultimately saves the council money.
- Access to food banks – how far do you have to travel in rural areas and without transport is it feasible? Do mobile food banks exist?
- Access to higher education is an issue in SW for 16+. Need to travel to main centres for example in Mid Devon to Exeter, Newton Abbott or Taunton.
- Can be hard for those young people living in rural areas to socialize.
- Mental health provision for young people is important
- Social Media can give false impressions of what life is like.
- Recruiting social workers in Devon is an issue
- How do we attract and recruit/maintain social workers?
- Can take 18-21 weeks to get referrals to see mental health specialist
- Extra Care housing is important – can we keep people in their own communities which ultimately keeps costs down
- Cornwall now have transport powers through devolution which can help as for example it can arrange bus journeys to support train arrival and departure times
- Need integrated public transport system – school buses/normal use so that people in rural communities can get to work and not just cater solely for school children
- There is a scheme in Cornwall where parents pay for school bus pass post 16 but can pay more and get weekend travel and hopefully in the future train access, encouraging them to be out and about and accessing services more.

BEST PRACTICE / SIGNPOSTS to useful information

- Fingertips – run by Public Health England which enable comparisons of a wide range of indicators and often at local authority level
<https://fingertips.phe.org.uk>
- University of East Anglia doing research at the moment on looking at the Indices of Multiple Deprivation without the urban bias so that smaller pockets of deprivation can be identified.
- Joseph Rowntree Foundation – Study into Minimum Income Standards for rural areas compared to urban
<https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/minimum-income-standard-rural-households>
- Rural Manifesto 2009 by the Carnegie Trust looks at measuring the capacity of rural areas

<https://www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/publications/a-manifesto-for-rural-communities-inspiring-community-innovation/>

- There has been a case study in Scotland that looked at communities and how active they are to measure the resources a community has, for example Active Parish Council, Transport, Car Clubs, Activators etc.