

NOTES FROM THE MEETING TO CONSIDER THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A RURAL POLICY AND PRACTITIONERS GROUP

Meeting held at Weber Shandwick, Fox Court, 14 Grays Inn Road, Holborn, London

Monday 16th May 2011

Present:-

Gemma Bradshaw (Age UK); Sarah Lee (Countryside Alliance), Helen Woolley (CLA), Gerard Crofton-Martin (Citizens Advice), Jill Hopkinson (Arthur Rank Centre), Richard Kirlew (Church of Wales), Peter Couchman (Plunkett Foundation), Chris Mann (IRH), Jane Atterton (Rural Policy Centre, SAC), Rachel Barber (Women's Institute)
Councillor Nick Worth (RSP), Graham Biggs, David Inman, Brian Wilson, (RSN)

Apologies:-

Carnegie Trust, Action for Market Towns, ACRE, FSB, Knight Frank, NFU, Councillor Roger Begy (RSN)

Wishing to be kept on listings: Joseph Rowntree Foundation

1. Introduction

Graham Biggs introduced the present situation. Of the 23 organisations approached with regard to the proposed grouping 17 had agreed in principle to be involved and 1 had asked to be kept on the mailing list.

The meeting was however an exploratory one to determine whether such a group should be formed and, if so, how such a group should operate and what its terms of reference should be.

The following was the RSN's current thinking:-

1. The grouping should be loose fit with no formal existence in terms of company or other legal structure.
2. It would be UK wide.
3. It would primarily be about best practice identification, cataloguing and dissemination.
4. It would not have a representational or lobbying role.
5. Its purpose was to work with the bodies involved in the Group to identify rurally related common information and issues of common concern.

2. Discussion

1. A clearly different role from that of the Rural Coalition needed to be ensured. (A discussion note on that organisation's future was being circulated to its members and the two roles needed to be cross checked against one another to avoid duplication).
2. It was felt that whilst forums (particularly through email) were excellent and a national convention would be really useful, there were no resources to underpin the Group's operation beyond the limited resources the RSN was prepared to input and, therefore, the identified aims should at this stage not be over ambitious or too broad so there was scope for integration with any forums that emerged from current initiatives or from the roll over from the Regional Rural Affairs Forums.
3. However it was agreed that an arrangement through an informal group that logged views from individual organisations across the UK on rural concerns and on gathering and disseminating best practice would be useful to the organisations present.
4. It was also considered that a cross UK approach would be useful to establish what variance was occurring across the UK, what lessons could be learnt, and what thoughts could be shared ones.

3. Process

It was concluded that there were 3 processes involved:-

- (a) Initial collating of information and issues of current concern to each of the organisations involved.
- (b) Coming together as a UK group after such interim work through a convention.
- (c) Continuing from an agreed position.

4. Next Steps

1. A formal matrix would be formulated and circulated to all organisations:-
 - (a) To establish whether there were other organisations other than the 17 currently involved who should be approached at this stage.
 - (b) What organisations would find (mindful of the caveats entered above) most useful from the structuring of the group.
 - (c) Identifying what issues rural organisations or organisations involved in rural issues were currently specifically considering in the rural context.
2. A brief note would be prepared to assist this process setting out the perceived current position across the UK in relation to joint working arrangements.

3. A further draft of the 'aims and objectives of the Group's operation would be prepared hopefully reflecting the position established at the meeting on which views would be sought in the hope of establishing a consensus position.

5. Administrative Arrangements

It was agreed that:-

- (a) The RSN would act as the Secretariat for the Group.
- (b) No membership fee would be payable for participation.
- (c) A website relating to the work of the group would be established as a separate area of rsn.online.org.uk to which all involved in the Group would have free access.
- (d) A formal logo was agreed by the meeting for group operation (draft as circulated).