

## **Rural Affordable Housing Seminar – AI Summary meeting notes**

**09 July 2025**

### **Summary**

The meeting focused on rural housing challenges and solutions, with discussions covering funding needs, affordability issues, and the importance of developing appropriate housing plans for rural areas. Participants explored various policy measures and initiatives, including planning reforms, infrastructure improvements, and the role of local authorities in housing delivery. The session concluded with a presentation on e-vouchers and discussions about the impact of devolution on rural areas, emphasising the need for balanced approaches to housing development and community planning.

### **Rural Housing Crisis Campaign Launch**

Kerry Booth, Chief Exec of the Rural Services Network, outlined their Delivering for All campaign, which calls for fair funding, accurate metrics, and a rural-specific plan from the government. She highlighted the affordability crisis in rural areas, with houses being unaffordable for low earners and a growing homelessness problem. Adam Gravely, a Policy Officer from the National Housing Federation, discussed the urgent need for affordable rural housing and shared his personal experience of how rural social housing had transformed his family's life. He emphasised the need for a long-term housing plan to address the crisis, including building 300,000 homes per year with 40% affordable, and reducing child homelessness.

### **Planning and Housing Investment Strategies**

The meeting discussed the Planning and Infrastructure Bill, which includes measures to reform compulsory purchase orders to enable local councils to buy land at fair prices, and supports boosting investment in planning departments. The Nature Restoration Fund's secondary aspects are still under discussion, but its principles aim to overcome delays in rural areas caused by nutrient neutrality issues. The government's spending review included £39 billion for a social and affordable homes program over 10 years, additional funding for social housing remediation, and a Warm Homes Plan. The National Housing Federation encourages early engagement between local planning authorities, developers, and housing associations to improve Section 106 agreements. Devolution is a significant feature for the government, with 12 areas currently having mayoral devolution. The conversation ended with a discussion on the economic impact of social housing in local areas, using a calculator tool developed by the National Housing Federation and Cebr.

## **Rural Housing Solutions in Gloucestershire**

Tim Gwilliam MBE from Gloucestershire Rural Community Council then presented on rural housing challenges in Gloucestershire, where rising property prices and demographic changes are threatening village sustainability. The speakers highlighted how affordable housing needs are often unmet, with many small developments being unfeasible for registered providers due to financial constraints and capacity issues. Proposed solutions include making local connections mandatory in Section 106 agreements, supporting SME developers to become registered providers, and creating more downsizing options for older residents to stay in their communities. The speakers noted a positive shift in government attitudes towards rural housing under the current administration, though they emphasised the need for practical implementation of these changes.

## **Rural Affordable Housing Crisis Discussion**

Tim presented on the urgent need for affordable housing in rural areas, highlighting delays in housing development and the challenges faced by young people and families. He emphasised the importance of changing societal approaches to affordable housing and called for action to prevent the further decline of rural communities. The discussion touched on issues such as housing needs surveys, community-led housing, and the impact of second homes and Airbnb on local housing stock. Tim and other speakers, including Councillor Peacock and Carol, shared experiences and concerns from their respective areas, emphasising the need for more affordable housing options and better protection of Section 106 funding.

## **Digital Fund Distribution Platform Overview**

Harry Thompson, a Senior Business Development Manager at EVouchers, presented an overview of the platform's mission to provide seamless, secure, and instantaneous fund distribution. He explained that evouchers, a subsidiary of Wand, was established during the COVID-19 pandemic to help schools and local authorities distribute funding to eligible families. The platform offers a digital approach to providing financial support, replacing manual methods with a more efficient and flexible system. Harry highlighted the platform's benefits for local authorities and housing associations, including the ability to distribute hardship and fuel funds, issue energy vouchers, and support decant projects. He emphasised that the platform is free to use, promotes independence and choice for recipients, and provides detailed auditing and reporting functions to ensure funds are used effectively.

## **Evoucher Platform Ordering Process**

Harry explained the process of purchasing and ordering vouchers, highlighting the flexibility and instant support the platform offers. He detailed the steps involved, from selecting voucher types and values to choosing brands and sending them to recipients via email or text message. Harry also discussed solutions for energy bill support, including cash out vouchers and prepaid meter cards, and mentioned the platform's versatility for various schemes. A delegate inquired about costs and data protection, to which Harry clarified that there are no costs for organisations to use the platform and that it complies with data protection regulations.

### **Rural Housing and Devolution Challenges**

The meeting focused on the potential impacts of devolution and local government reorganisation on rural areas, particularly regarding affordable housing delivery. Participants expressed concerns about the risk of urban-centric decision-making and the pressure on parish councils, with Tim highlighting the need for local knowledge. Graham emphasised the importance of capturing data at the lowest possible level to avoid resource imbalances between urban and rural areas. The discussion also touched on Section 106 agreements, with Adam explaining challenges around housing association financial capacity and the need for standard agreements to improve the process.

### **Rural Housing Development Challenges**

The meeting focused on the challenges and opportunities in building 1.5 million homes, with discussions centred on ensuring the right homes are built in the right places, particularly in rural areas. Participants highlighted the need for community plans, addressing housing registers, and encouraging migration from urban to rural areas. Concerns were raised about the impact of large-scale developments on rural infrastructure and the importance of involving young people in community planning. The group also discussed the need for innovative housing designs and the potential isolation of parish councils under new devolution plans. The session concluded with an announcement about an upcoming national rural conference in September.