

Notes from the Rural Services Network
South West Regional Seminar/Meeting
Kindly hosted by East Devon District Council

21st March 2019

- Attendees:** Cllr Adam Paynter (RSN Vice Chair for SW and Leader Cornwall County Council) Graham Biggs (RSN Chief Executive) Jon Turner (RSN Policy Director) Cllr Brian Bailey (East Devon DC) Cllr Simon Grundy (East Devon DC) Henry Lee, External Policy & Research Co-Ordinator (Hastoe Group) Andrew Potter, Chief Executive (Hastoe Group) Leisa Kelly, Specialist – Strategic Planning (South Somerset DC) Sue Southwell, Rural Housing Enabler (Devon Communities Together) Beccy Brown, Localities Engagement Lead (West Somerset DC) Hattie Winter, Brexit Resilience & Opportunities Group Secretariat (BROG) (Heart of the South West) Susan Hayter, Project Co-Ordinator (Bath & North East Somerset Council) Heather Stallard, Co-Ordinator (Blackdown Support Group) Teresa Rabbetts, Housing Enabling Officer (Dorset Councils Partnership) Marie Stainwright, Senior Planning Policy Officer (Isle of Wight Council) Anne Kemp, Monitoring & Evaluating Co-Ordinator (Cornwall Rural Community Charity) Cllr Ken James (Torrige District Council) Cllr Sue Osborne (South Somerset District Council) Neil Anderson, Strategy Specialist (Taunton Deane District Council) Simon Parker (Dorset Councils Partnership) Reg Clarke, SW Regional Representative (Pub is the Hub) Nikki Knowles, External Affairs Manager South West (National Housing Federation) Peter Moore, Chief Executive (Cornwall Rural Housing Association Ltd) Vic Ebdon, (Devon Communities Together)
- Apologies:** The apologies for the meeting can be downloaded [here](#).
- Welcome**
The Chair, Cllr Adam Paynter, Leader of Cornwall Council and a member of the RSN Executive, welcomed people to the second South West Regional Meeting & Seminar. He thanked East Devon District Council for their support in hosting the event.
- Presentations**
The Seminar session received presentations from Nikki Knowles, External Affairs Manager for the South West - National Housing Federation and Vic Ebdon, Devon Communities Together. The links to the presentations are attached.

Nikki Knowles – Rural Employment, business and skills - Download [here](#)

Comments received after the presentation related to underinvestment in the rural communities and the requirement for additional affordable housing. In many rural areas in the South West house prices were too high and out of reach of local people. It was also evident that the delivery of more affordable housing in rural communities

helped to sustain essential rural services, which are currently disappearing at an alarming rate.

Vic Ebdon, Constructing Futures - Download [here](#)

Comments received after the presentation related to the changing nature of the construction sector since the 2008 recession which led to a significant decline in traditional building skill especially in rural areas. The Constructing Futures Project is an exciting and innovative model which addresses the current lack of opportunities for young people who wish to access construction skills. The project has also helped to address the stigma about the construction sector by raising the profile and benefits of working in the construction industry.

5. RSP Best Practice Session

**Presentation by Peter Moore, CEO, Cornwall Rural Housing Association, Ltd
Download [here](#)**

Comments received after the presentation related to concerns about the quality and room sizes of new private sector homes (including those acquired by RSLs as affordable homes under Section 106 Agreements) and the cost of delivering homes especially in small isolated rural communities. It was also recognised that parish councils are an important partner and enabler in community engagement and affordable housing delivery.

The Chair thanked all 3 presenters for their interesting presentations and different dimensions brought to the meeting's attention

6. General Discussion

Graham Biggs introduced the RSN's call on government for a cross-departmental, holistic Rural Strategy which was launched as a national campaign on 1st March. Cllr Paynter urged people to sign up to the campaign and become ambassadors for the idea by promoting to others the need to support the campaign.

The following issues were raised and discussed

(a) Involvement of Parish Councils and their Principal Councils.

It is important for local organisations when contemplating an affordable housing scheme to engage with their parish, town and district/unitary councils at an early stage. It was also considered important to provide an integrated approach to developing strategies for rural housing scheme, for example a neighbourhood plan. This approach would help deliver an inclusive and integrated plan delivered by and on half of the local community.

(b) The cost of delivering affordable housing in rural areas.

It was recognised that the cost of delivering affordable housing in rural areas is expensive, due to onerous abnormal cost, for example, utility installation and upgrades and the construction of highway infrastructure. However, it was recognised that investing in rural housing provides an economic and community stimulus that helps to sustain and grow the local economy.

(c) Building and Construction Standards.

There was general consensus that there was an urgent need to ensure that building standards were improved, especially housing delivered by the larger developers. Both the external and internal construction finishes were considered to be inadequate. There was also concern that since the externalisation of many of the Council's Building Control Services, building standards have declined.

(d) Evidence

As most local rural authorities have few resources, we need to make the case for more investment in rural housing. Political leaders need to be brave and look at innovative ways to deliver more rural housing by working with Community Land Trusts and challenging the larger housing developers to deliver better quality housing, for example by engaging with them early in the development process and through legal agreements ensure the housing delivered is to a good standard.

7. Next Steps

Cllr Adam Paynter identified the value of keeping the lobbying agenda moving forward in terms of the issues raised today – particularly in relation to the rural strategy argument.

All attendees were encouraged to sign up to support the Rural Strategy Campaign (ADD LINK)

Graham Biggs said that the RSN would work with the Rural Housing Alliance to add “depth and texture” to the Housing Section of the RSN's Template Rural Strategy